Children’s Services Report
Public libraries offer services to users of all ages. Increasingly, services to young children and their caregivers are a core component of a successful library. Over the years, expectations and services in this area have changed greatly. While these changes are exciting, offering opportunities to explore new ideas and experiences, they also present a challenge to a library.

What is the right approach to take? Should the library embrace the new and reject the old, or should the library value tradition and be suspicious of change?

To answer these questions, we ran a community-based listening and planning process. The purpose of this process was for us to learn from our patrons: what services are valued, what services they would like to see added, and what type of experience they would like when visiting the Library.

We found the process fulfilling and rewarding. It also helped us to gain an insight into how our library is perceived and used. Based on this, we have developed a plan of action that we hope will make the Library more valuable to our patrons.

This report provides an overview of the process, details what we learned, shares the goals we have developed and lays out an action plan to help realize those goals.
The planning process was led by two Library Trustees: James Riina and Julie Edwards, supported by Library staff.

There were four main parts to the process:

- A staff workshop
- Dot boards for library users to interact with
- An online public survey
- A community forum

Overall, more than three hundred people engaged in the process and shared their thoughts and ideas.

Here is what we learned by engaging in this process.
Books Matter!

Books are the most important service we offer. This came across in the survey, through the Dot Boards and in our conversations. For example, when asked why do you visit the Library, finding a book was the number 1 reason given.

![Bar chart showing reasons for visiting the library]

- Find a book or other material: 121
- Specific program: 70
- Use the toys or puzzles: 51
- Social gathering: 18
- Use the computers (literacy stations): 15
- To explore a subject area: 8
- Schoolwork or tutoring: 6
- Other: 17
Our collection of books was also seen as the most valued feature of our Children’s Library.

The Collection Counts

What do you like most about the Main Library children's space?

- Collection: 95
- Educational toys: 55
- Warm and inviting: 49
- Location: 49
- Bright and spacious: 41
- Free education: 40
- Sense of community: 36
- A place to connect with ideas & other people: 33
- Displays: 27
- Other: 7
Interactions With Staff

Interactions with staff are very important. Our librarians help patrons find books and information that they are looking for, and the nature of the interaction greatly influences the quality of a visit to the Library.

Overall our staff is liked and respected by our patrons, but there is one area where our patrons see room for improvement: managing behavior of visitors to the Children’s Room.
Staff’s Perspective

This issue was also identified as a problem by our staff. When asked what they would to change, behavioral expectations was top of the list.

The staff most values:

- The great collection of books in the Children’s Room
- Connecting people to knowledge and topics
- The fact that the Children’s Room size is cozy and manageable

The staff would like to change:

- At times the Children’s Room is too noisy
- The Children’s Room needs better separation from the main area
- There needs to be a clear and simple code of conduct that details rules for children and caregivers.
Behavior Management

How people behave affects other people. Many patrons find their experience in the Library diminished because of the behavior of other library patrons.

This is a challenging area for the Library. Current trends in the library world are towards a less formal and rules oriented space, with more noise and movement than in the past. A number of visitors feel this is how a modern library should be. But other visitors find this approach disruptive.

The challenge for us is to balance creating an atmosphere where people feel welcome and not judged, but also keeping the Children’s Room relatively quiet and calm. This dissatisfaction can be seen most clearly when we look at the overall rankings of satisfaction, where the three lowest ranked statements are related to behavioral issues.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>How satisfied are you with the statement...</th>
<th>Top 2-Box (Very Satisfied &amp; Satisfied)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>The staff helps connect people with material</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Environment</td>
<td>The children's space is filled with the right books, media &amp; programs</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>The children's space values being respectful and listening</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>The children's space is a center for learning</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>The staff provides free education for self growth and enrichment</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Environment</td>
<td>The children's space is warm and welcoming</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>The children's space values being inclusive and inviting</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>The children's space is for children to connect with each other</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>The children's space is a world of ideas to be explored</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>The children's space values creativity and innovation</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>The staff interacts with children and adults effectively</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>The children's space values a clear code of conduct</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Environment</td>
<td>The children's space is organized by appropriately designated zones</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Environment</td>
<td>The children's space is a place for children to explore and discover</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Environment</td>
<td>The children's space is for connecting people to ideas and each other</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>The staff creates an inviting and inquisitive environment</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>The staff manages disruptive people properly</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>The staff provides clear guidelines on appropriate behavior</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>The staff manages behavioral expectations of children &amp; caregivers</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tied in to behavioral issues is the issue of dissatisfaction with the space.

What do you like least about the Main Library children's space?

- Structure / layout of space: 55
- Disruptive behavior by children: 23
- Disruptive behavior by caregivers: 22
- Noise level: 21
- Behavior policy: 19
- Clearly designated noise level zones: 18
- Clear philosophy: 10
- Other: 37
A History

The Library was built in 1965. At that time everyone was expected to be very quiet in the Library. This meant there was no need to separate a children’s area from the main area of the Library. Also, the typical layout was study tables and bookshelves. Discovery zones, preschool areas, storytime rooms, etc. were not imagined. And, of course, personal computers were not even on the horizon.

Over the years we have tried to update the Children's Room by opening it up, creating a dedicated preschool area, installing computer tables and adding a storytime space in the basement. But as time passes the Children’s Room increasingly fails to meet the expectations of our community.
Based upon what we have learned from this process, we have set the following goals.

**Physical Layout**

We would like to create a Children’s Room that has the potential to be calmer and quieter, that has a play area/discovery zone towards the back of the room that contains stimulating and Library appropriate toys and games, that has low and accessible shelving for the collection of books, that houses computers discretely, has some cozy nooks for readers and has better separation from the Main Library. Also, we will create an enhanced space for storytimes and a new layout to make the Children’s Room more user-friendly for very young children and their caregivers.

**Policies**

We need to develop a policy for behavior that better encourages more "library like" behavior. Developing this policy will be the easy part. We also need to help staff to implement it and we need to communicate it effectively to all Library users.

**Staffing**

We want Library visitors to have rewarding interactions with knowledgeable and caring staff members.

**Services (programs, collections)**

We want to have a wonderful collection of books that is easily accessed by all of our users. We also want to build on our successful programming by creating a better space for our very popular storytimes and by providing more programs that can be enjoyed by working parents and their children.
Vision – Visual Concepts

Top 3 (of 10) images respondents selected when asked which best represents the way they want their experience in the children's space to be.

#1 Scoring Visual 35%
#2 Scoring Visual 27%
#3 Scoring Visual 15%
Create a Master Plan for the Main Library and the Branch Library. A key component of this Master Plan will be the goals outlined above.

To minimize disruption, break the Master Plan up into a series of smaller projects, and commit to making a full redesign of the Janet Cooper Dakin Children’s Room the first project.

Approve using existing funds for this project so that work can begin within a year.

Develop new guidelines for behavior in the Children's Room that balance the desire to create a welcoming and nurturing environment with the need to create a calmer space where all visitors feel comfortable.

Help to make these guidelines successful by creating a series of visual cues that playfully and respectfully communicate the message.
**Staffing**

- Where feasible, commit to staffing the Children’s Room predominantly with specialist Children’s Librarians.
- Develop a Staff Development Day to help staff better understand and develop tools to successfully implement the new behavior guidelines.

**Services (Programs, Collections)**

- Working in conjunction with the Master Plan, evaluate the size and layout of the book collection to ensure that it is easily accessible to all users.
- Create attractive displays that are regularly refreshed
- Offer children’s programming every weekend.
- Make books and love of reading and learning the theme that underpins all of our children’s programming.